

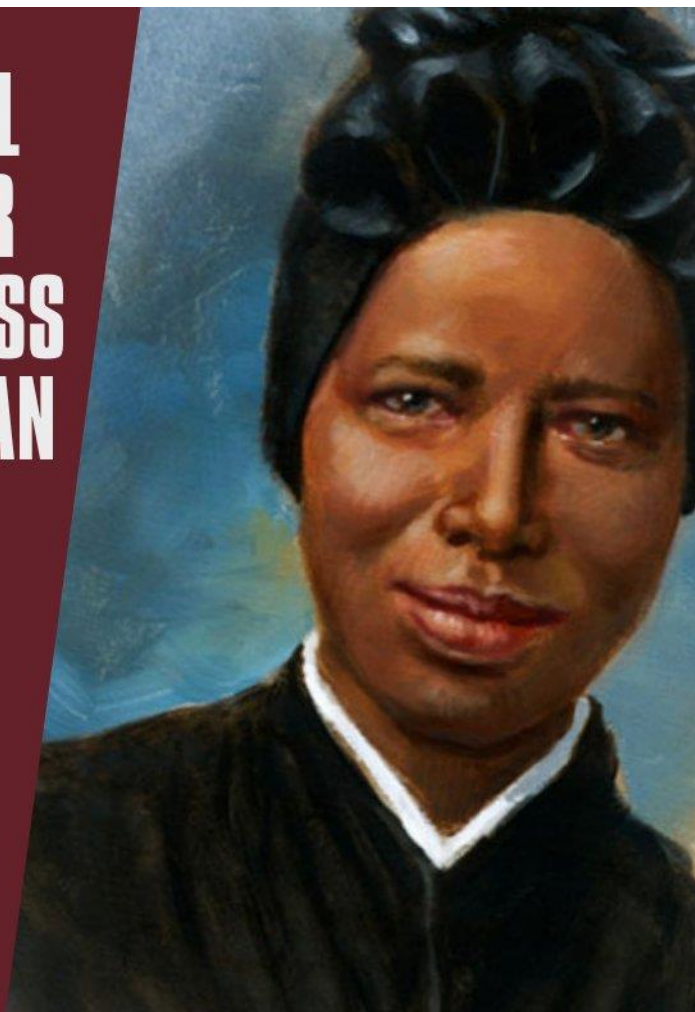
“JOURNEYING IN DIGNITY: LISTEN, DREAM, ACT”

TENTH DAY OF PRAYER AND AWARENESS AGAINST HUMAN TRAFFICKING 2024

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER AND AWARENESS AGAINST HUMAN TRAFFICKING

February 8 is the feast day of St. Josephine Bakhita, who was kidnapped as a child and sold into slavery in Sudan and Italy.

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Human trafficking – a crime against humanity

In 2015 Pope Francis inaugurated the observance of a World Day of Prayer and Awareness against Human Trafficking. The institution of this Day followed very clear words uttered by His Holiness at two separate international conferences in 2014.

In his Address to the participants of the “**2014 International Conference on Combatting Human Trafficking**” held at the Vatican on 10 April 2014, Pope Francis describes human trafficking as “...**an open wound on the body of contemporary society, a scourge upon the body of Christ. It is a crime against humanity.**”¹

Four months later, on 23 October 2014, His Holiness reinforced his avowal that human trafficking is a crime against humanity in his Address to the delegates of the **International Association of Penal Law**:

¹ https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/april/documents/papa-francesco_20140410_tratta-persone-umane.html

“Enslaving people, human trafficking and war crimes are recognized as crimes against humanity, both by international law and by many national laws. It is a crime against humanity. And since it is not possible to commit so complex a crime as human trafficking without the complicity, by action or omission, of States, it is evident that, when efforts to prevent and combat this phenomenon are insufficient, we are again facing a crime against humanity.”²

The purpose of the World Day of Prayer and Awareness against Human Trafficking

On 6 February 2015 Pope Francis explained the purpose of this Day as follows:

“...the primary objective of this Day is to create greater awareness of the phenomenon of human trafficking and to reflect on the situation of violence and injustice that affects so many people’s lives who have no voice, do not count, and are no one: they are simply slaves. Another goal is to attempt to provide solutions to counter this modern form of slavery by taking concrete actions.”

8 FEBRUARY and the World Day of Prayer and Awareness against Human Trafficking

Pope Francis elected to have the World Day of Prayer and Awareness against Human Trafficking observed on the 8th of February, the Optional Memorial of St. Josephine Bakhita, the patron saint of victims and survivors of human trafficking. Abducted, enslaved and trafficked while yet a child and later, a young woman, St Josephine is also the patron saint of Sudan, the land of her birth.

For some interesting insights about St Josephine Bakhita, **view the video reflection of her life journey from an enslaved and trafficked Sudanese child to her canonisation by Pope St John Paul II** on 1 October 2000 by going to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SUnbep5s-DQ>

² https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/october/documents/papa-francesco_20141023_associazione-internazionale-diritto-penale.html



(Credit: AP Photo/Andrew Medichini.)

Tenth Day of Prayer and Awareness against Human Trafficking: February 2024

Since its inception in 2015 the sitting Pope delivers a **Message** in which he reflects on the chief reasons for the occurrence of human trafficking worldwide and on how, with this newly-won awareness, we should not only pray for victims and survivors of human trafficking, but also to hasten to their aid in the spirit of social justice.

Additionally, we are encouraged to raise our voices in prayer and protest against structural and systemic injustices that make it possible for human trafficking to be the world's fastest growing criminal industry.

For the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the World Day of Prayer and Awareness against Human Trafficking Pope Francis gave his **Message** the title: **"Journeying in Dignity: Listen, Dream, Act"**³.

This excerpt from the Message is central to understanding what Pope Francis identifies as one of the main reasons for the global scale of modern human trafficking, despite the work of 'courageous reporters' and of various groups and communities throughout the world.

³ <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2024/documents/20240208-messaggio-tratta-persone.html>

“Trafficking...often goes unseen. The media...have brought to light modern forms of slavery, but the culture of indifference tends to desensitize us. Let us help one another to be more responsive, to open our lives and hearts to our sisters and brothers who even now are being bought and sold as slaves.

Thank God, many young people have taken up the challenge of this World Day against trafficking. Their enthusiasm and commitment show us the way: they remind us that we are called to *listen, dream and act* in order to counter trafficking.”



To watch the **STOP HUMAN TRAFFICKING: FLASH-MOB IN ROME** simply use the following link <https://www.uisg.org/en/news/Veglia-di-Preghiera-Interreligiosa-Camminare-per-la-dignita>

What is the Catholic Church’s teaching regarding the sin of human trafficking?

The Catholic Church bases its teaching regarding the sin of human trafficking on the Seventh Commandment: **“You shall not steal”**.

While this may come as somewhat of a surprise to us, paragraph 2414 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church [CCC] clearly states:

“The seventh commandment forbids acts or enterprises that for any reason – selfish or ideological, commercial, or totalitarian – lead to the *enslavement of human beings*, to their being bought, sold and exchanged like merchandise, in disregard for their personal dignity. It is a sin against the dignity of persons and their fundamental rights to reduce them by violence to their productive value or to a source of profit. St. Paul directed a Christian master to treat his Christian slave ‘no longer as a slave but more than a slave, as a beloved brother, ...both in the flesh and in the Lord.’ [CCC2414]

But. Where in the Bible does it say: “You shall not steal”?

In Exodus chapter 20, verse 15 of the Old Testament we read:

“Then God spoke all these words: he said: ‘I am Yahweh your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no gods except me...[verse 3] **‘You shall not steal’** “. [verse 15]

In the New Testament, in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 19 verses 17 to 19, we read that when a rich young man asks Jesus what ‘good deed’ he must do to ‘possess’ eternal life, Jesus’ answers him with question:

“Why do you ask me about what is good?”

This is no rhetorical question, however, as we can gather from what Jesus says next:

“If you wish to enter life, keep the commandments...You must not kill. You must not commit adultery. **You must not steal.** You must not bear false witness. Honour your father and your mother, and you must love your neighbour as you love yourself.”

Where in the Bible is a Christian slave owner directed to treat his Christian slave as a “beloved brother...both in the flesh and in the Lord”?

The correct answer is: THE LETTER TO PHILEMON, which is also the shortest of St. Paul’s letters.

In this letter St. Paul writes to Philemon, a Christian master of the runaway slave Onesimus, and entreats Philemon to welcome the converted Onesimus back “as a beloved brother”. To read this short letter, use the following link - <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/philemon/1>

no longer as a slave
but more than a
slave -
a beloved
brother

Philemon 16 a

